

**Veterans Services Commission Meeting**  
**Monday, October 4, 2004, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Legislative Building, Room 3143, Carson City**

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**Present:**                **Chuck Fulkerson, NOVS Executive Director**  
                              **Steve Long, NOVS Deputy Executive Director**  
                              **Ron Kruse, Veterans Services Commission Chairman**  
                              **Senator Terry Care, Veterans Services Commission Vice Chairman**  
                              **Assemblywoman Kathy McClain, Veterans Services Commission Member**  
                              **Brad Benson, Veterans Services Commission Member**  
                              **Stan Jones, Veterans Services Commission Member**  
                              **Daryl Mobley, Veterans Services Commission Member**  
                              **Joanne Molen, Veterans Services Commission Member**  
                              **David Wyble, Veterans Services Commission Member**  
                              **Jeanette Rae, NOVS Service Officer**  
                              **Frances Peña, Administrative Assistant**

**Absent:**                **Charles (Ron) LaBar, Veterans Services Commission Member**

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

The Chairman entertains a motion to approve the agenda as printed. Daryl Mobley moved to approve the agenda as printed, Stan Jones seconded the motion. Agenda is unanimously approved.

The Chairman entertains a motion to approve the minutes of the last meeting as printed. David Wyble moved to approve the minutes as printed, Daryl Mobley seconded the motion. Minutes are unanimously approved.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**1.     Report from VA Medical Center by Lisa Howard for Jana Johnson**

Dr. Kurt Schlegelmelch will be reporting as the new Director of the VA Medical Center (VAMC). He will report the first week of November. The VAMC has sought the help of two consultants, one from Headquarters and one from Software system they currently use, to work on the telephone access system. The VAMC has also been working on outreach to veterans, helping them understand the benefits to which they are entitled. They have partnered with Regional Office and Nevada Office of Veterans Services to target a couple of special populations. Returning veterans from Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom are priority. Letters have recently been sent out to veterans inviting them to seek out VA and healthcare benefits. To date, approximately 75 of returning veterans have responded. Outreach to Native American Healthcare Summit was given. Former POWs were conducting special outreach to them as were Women veterans. The Cardiac Cath lab of the hospital is now open and will have it first procedure this week. They will begin with diagnostics only and over time hope to build expertise and start working interventions. For time being, urgent interventions will continue to go to local hospitals. A new MRI has been installed and is currently operational. The VAMC

is working on backlog that built up during the installation. Currently under construction is the Operation Room and Intensive Care Unit and will continue for the next year or so. They are working on the privacy issues and installing bathrooms and overall aesthetics of those areas. Physical therapy, Rehab and the Prosthetics area is also currently under construction and will be so for the next year. Approval for a single deck parking structure has been obtained. Installation of the single deck structure will be above the back third of the current parking lot, which will bring current parking to just fewer than 900 spaces. This will be about a 130 space increase. The need for parking is anticipated to be met for the next 10 years. There is approval for a new clinic in Fallon, NV and with hope will be operational next year (2005). The actual site of the clinic is still undetermined as well as what hours it would be open. The VAMC would like to have it staffed by VA personnel instead of an outside contracted clinic. There is tentative approval for Emergency Room expansion. Construction is predicted to begin 2006. One last piece of construction to enhance patient care is the Primary Care expansion. This has been submitted but has not yet been approved. They anticipate a 2006/2007 time frame.

**2. Report for VA Regional Office by Chuck Fulkerson for Steve Simmons**

The VARO ended the fiscal year with approximately 3,200 pending claims (the fiscal year ended September 30th). They began fiscal year 04 with approximately 2,700. The rating timeliness has been cut down to 113 days, which is 2/3 off the waiting list. Of the 3,200 pending claims, roughly 1,000 are pending appeals. The current turnaround time for appeals is about 252 days. Continued efforts are being made to train the Service Officers.

**3. Report from VA Ambulatory Care Clinic by Rudy Klopfer for John Bright**

The site of the new hospital to be built in Las Vegas was recently announced. It will be a 90-bed inpatient hospital and 120-bed nursing home. The size may change upwards of 900,000 sq. ft., approximately 150 acres. They have started flu shots for eligible vets (those enrolled in the VA system are eligible) and run through the end of January. The new director search committee initiated out of the network office in Long Beach, California is meeting later this week to review applications and come up with shorter list so they can do interviews. As of last time, those interviewed will meet with state commanders and have the opportunity to ask questions. In mid September there was an outreach to veterans in the Tonopah area. There was great success, about 150 veterans were seen. Unfortunately there are not enough people in the Tonopah area to open a CBOC clinic. As numbers increase, they will revisit the idea. They continue to work with joint veteran partners of the Air Force ER tower project. They are moving along aggressively and are ahead of schedule. This will increase the psychiatric beds and ER space for the Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital as well as allow additional ICU beds. This is anticipated for March to May 2005.

**4. Change of command at the Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital**

There has been a change of command for the base hospital (no name available). A ceremony was held at Nellis AFB. The hospital Commander's name is Col. Alley. This is all the information available at this time.

**5. Report from DAV Commander, David Wyble**

Something needs to be done about the maintenance of the Fernley cemetery. The Commission should consider using various Veteran groups in the area to keep up the grounds (specifically the individual monuments for various service organizations). Their assistance should be utilized until alternatives are found. It was proposed that the Director, Chuck Fulkerson, write letters to all Veteran organizations and address it to each commander and ask them to consider providing work detail to come and help clean up the area. Also proposed was the utilizing the Jr. ROTC program in Carson and Reno since they have to do community service. A letter can also be written to them so they can come out perhaps once a year. This is a viable solution until more staff is hired to up keep the grounds. Also, transportation should be provided for the Reno VA as well as in Las Vegas. This year the target is to purchase nine vans, three for up north six for down south. A van was recently lost in Winnemucca. Each van costs \$12,000 (the organization's share) and the chapters in the northern area have accumulated almost enough to purchase two vans. The Colorado trust that is working in conjunction with the National DAV office provides the other half to purchase the vans. A proposal will be made at the Mid-winter conference in Tonopah to recommend the DAV transportation coordinator in the VA Regional Medical Center located in Reno also be a Service Officer. On October 19<sup>th</sup>, the National Director will be in Boulder City. Also on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005 there will be a Luncheon with our State Legislators at the Legislative Building (Room 3100) in Carson City from 11am to 2pm.

**6. Report from Nevada State Veterans Home by Gary Bermeosolo**

Since the last meeting they have doubled resident rates. Due to this increase, the Home finished that last fiscal year in the black instead of the red which would not have been possible without increasing those rates. They succeeded in passing the annual Department of Veterans Affairs State Home inspection last April with zero noted deficiencies. They managed to convince IFC members to allow them to add 14 new staff positions in order to enhance resident care (all positions are healthcare related). Originally approximately 29 positions were cut when the new Administrator came on board with the understanding that if those positions were needed in the future, they could come back and ask for them. New state-of-the-art electric beds were purchase to replace the out-dated and unsafe ones. New servers were purchased to update data processing. They persuaded the Governor's budget office to allow them to offer RNs enhanced salary, which has helped them in recruiting efforts. Safety Officers were hired that have implemented a program to provide staffing for an information office and security for the Home on a 24/7 basis. The name of the Home was changed to the Nevada State Veterans Home. They will keep costs down by using old business cards and letterhead. This was also done to prevent confusion with the new Federal Veterans Home being built. They have increase resident population to 136 through the opening of the third and final neighborhood, Sidewinder. The waiting list has been completed. Applications are currently being solicited for residency. Presently, 59 applications are being processed and are in various stages of completion. Donations were received to purchase three new large Webber BBQ grills and three new handicapped concrete picnic tables. They have realigned the business office to streamline the billing and collections process and created a Budget Officer position. It was determined, with Director approval, to no longer charge residents for ancillary expenses of under \$5.00. This was possible due to an increase in resident fees.

**7. Report from Northern Cemetery Committee by Stan Jones**

Within the last year a plaque was made for those who contributed immensely to the Fernley cemetery. This year the names of Mr. and Mrs. Dave Parsons were added. Due to shortages and poor quality, water continues to be a problem at the Fernley cemetery.

**8. Report from Southern Cemetery Committee by Brad Benson**

In September, there were 111 veterans and spouses buried. Total count for the calendar year through September is 1,228. A total of about 1,600 are anticipated through calendar year 2004. There have been 623 cremations versus 605 casket burials. Since the cemetery has opened, through September, 16,450 veterans and spouses have been buried. To date, there are 8,605 casket burials, 7,845 cremations and 68 disinternments of veterans and spouses at the family's request. We've had our 2<sup>nd</sup> sub committee meeting of the SNVMC. The sub committee is made up of a couple members of the Cemetery committee in addition to those from various veterans groups. They are trying to give the Cemetery Superintendent assistance such as setting up Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies.

**9. Report from the Deputy Director of Veterans Services**

In Fernley, the expansion and construction is nearly completed. There were a couple of items not funded such as the kiosk. This is a device that visitors and families can go to and enter the veteran's name in the computer and the computer can locate the grave site. Since this was not funded, requests were sent to the National Cemetery Administration for additional funds. In Boulder City the expansion project is about to begin. The primary concern is ensuring they have adequate burial sites.

**10. Report from the Executive Director of Veterans Services**

The agency continues to make improvements in providing care to an ever increasing veteran's population with very limited resources. Operation Recognition has seen over 100 veterans apply for a High School Diploma. All of the LCB audit items have been corrected and most of the recommendations have been implemented. The team that has been built will continue to provide guardianship services in a proper and timely manner. A study is being conducted of WA state program to use as a guide to improve and enlarge our program. Under the leadership of Gary Bermeosolo, the Veterans Home continues to increase the health, welfare and care of Veteran residents while admitting new residents into the final wing. Last April the VA Medical Nursing Home Inspection Team spent 3 days with 17 members in the home. For a second year in a row the results were "NO DEFICIENCIES NOTED," a milestone in the history of State Veterans Homes. Wes Block, Fernley, and Jack Porrino, Boulder City, are continuing to provide a dignified, beautiful resting place for "Our Fallen Heroes." The \$3.5 million expansion program just completed has greatly improved the Fernley facility. Plans for a \$5 million expansion program for Boulder City are in the design phase. We will fast-track an area for cremations to keep up with demand. The Town Hall meeting in Elko and Wells last April has resulted in a consolidated, community-based coalition to provide support for a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Elko in the near future. The Salt Lake City VA Clinic acknowledges that the need for this facility is overwhelming and is working with Elko on a business plan to be submitted to the coming VA Strategic Plan for the coming fiscal year. Senators Reid and Ensign were

able to include a measure in the 2005 Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill requiring a report from VA within 60 days on plans for opening a CBOC in Elko. You have copies of 8 BDRs (Bill Draft Request) submitted for the '05 Legislature. A BDR will be submitted creating security for DD 214s recorded at County Recorder's offices.

**11. Naming of the new Post Office in Reno and approval of names for plaque**

The name of the new Post Office located at 1050 North Hills Blvd. in Reno is "Guardians of Freedom Memorial Post Office Building". A motion was made by the Chairman to approve the list of names for the plaque. Daryl Mobley and David Wyble second the motion. All were favor of endorsing the endeavor (unanimous).

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

- 1) Discuss the Cemetery greens ongoing issue
- 2) Discuss Operation Recognition Log status
- 3) Drivers License renewals

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.